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Italy weighs Bulgarian spy action

ROME — Italian Foreign Minister Emilio Colombo said yesterday that if the information Italian officials have about an alleged Bulgarian plot to assassinate Pope John Paul II last year turns out to be correct, the countries of NATO would have to be informed.

Secretary of State George P. Shultz, who was with Colombo when he made the statement, described the information that the Italians are still collecting as a "serious investigation with important implications." But both men stopped short of implying that the Soviet Union may have been behind the assassination attempt.

One Bulgarian official in Rome has already been arrested in connection with the shooting of the Pope, a warrant has been issued for the arrest of another Bulgarian alleged to be an official of the Bulgarian Secret Service. Within the last four days, the ambassadors of both countries have been withdrawn "for talks" amid rapidly growing tension between Bulgaria and Italy. A Bulgarian official news agency in Vienna yesterday suggested that the CIA was involved with the attempted assassin, Mehmet Ali Agca, a Turk.

Said Colombo after meeting with Shultz for nearly two hours yesterday: "We are following with great concern the evaluation of this situation. The data that we do have at the moment are not complete and not everything has been confirmed. We will give a political assessment when all the necessary data are confirmed.

"Of course, we consider the situation to be a very serious one, and if the data correspond to what are the assumptions at the moment, Italy will reflect very seriously on the conclusions to be drawn. We will also speak about this to our NATO allies."

Colombo later tried to downplay his latter comment by saying this would be a normal consultation because it would involve a member of the Warsaw Pact. And Shultz added: "I don't think it is well to speculate excessively on this. The government of Italy has said they would keep us informed. We'll rest at that."

The implication of the situation for East-West Security is vast, considering the head of the KGB in May 1981 was Yuri Andropov, now leader of the Soviet Union, and considering that Shultz has just concluded a unity-boosting meeting of NATO, which determined to continue planning the deployment of nuclear weapons but also offered a sincere hand of friendship to the new Soviet leadership.

Shultz met with the pope in the Vatican earlier in the day, but neither Shultz nor other U.S. officials would say if the "Bulgarian connection" and the Christian Democratic Party has asked Colombo and Prime Minister Amintore Fanfani for an explanation of actions of Bulgarian authorities in connection with the assassination attempt.